

# Septic System Workshops

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In early 2002, Governor and Executive Council approved a contract between the N. H. Estuaries Project and Granite

State Designers and Installers Association to host at least six free and open to the public educational workshops in the greater seacoast area of N. H. to acquaint residents about on-site wastewater treatment systems. The program is a 100 percent expansion over a similar contract in 2001.

The well-attended workshops were designed to explain septic system function and maintenance, do=s and don=ts of systems, and the application of alternative leaching products. A working model was incorporated and used to illustrate how systems function.

Numerous volunteers of the membership of Granite State Designers and Installers Association, with assistance from septic inspectors from the Sub-surface Systems Bureau of the N. H. Department of Environmental Services, and local health officers, also served as discussion leaders.

The workshop locations and number that attended were as follows:

\$ Wed., May 29, Community Center, Rochester - 10

\$ Tuesday, June 18, Urban Forestry Center, Portsmouth - 31

\$ Monday, July 8, Hampton Falls Town Hall - 21

\$ Wed., July 24, Northwood Town Hall - 48

\$ Wed., August 14, Exeter Town Hall - 27

\$ Monday, Sept. 9, Newmarket Town Hall - 35

Each of the workshops was promoted and scheduled to go from 7 to 9 p.m. each evening. All lasted well beyond 9:30 p.m. due to the number of questions and sincere interest generated by area citizens.

The sessions were lead by a team of association volunteers known for their septic expertise, as well as state and local

septic enforcement officials. Primary participants and instructors included:

--Thomas Canfield, Thomas Canfield Earth Construction, Rochester, NH. Mr. Canfield is well known and

respected licensed septic systems designer and installer and is the current chairman of the GSDIA Education

Committee, a position he has held for several years.

--James Shepard, NH Soil Consultants, Newmarket, NH. Mr. Shepard is also a licensed septic system designer/installer and is a former member of the GSDIA board of directors. He is currently serving as chairman of the

association=s Liaison Committee with the NH Dept. of

Environmental Service=s Sub-Surface Systems Bureau. Mr. Sheperd was once employed within the N.

H. Department

of Environmental Services Sub-surface Systems Bureau. He is a partner with N. H. Soil Consultants in Newmarket.

--Michael Sievert, PE, MJS Engineering, P.C., Newmarket, NH. Mr. Sievert is a former member of the GSDIA board of directors, and is a professional engineer, well known in the seacoast area for septic designs and related land use issues.

Also joining them at various program locations were:

--William A. Gosse, Gosse Septic Service, Center Barnstead, NH. Mr. Gosse is the GSDIA's board vice-chairman

for its septic pumpers section. More than 20 years on the Barnstead board of selectmen, he is also the current vice

president of the N.H. Association of Septage Haulers.

--Dennis Plante, DES Inspector, N.H. Dept. of Environmental Services Sub-Surface Systems Bureau. Dennis is one

of the Bureau's septic inspectors assigned to the seacoast area.

--Gerald Miller of Hampton. Mr. Miller is a licensed land surveyor, and an experienced septic designer. He is

current Chairman of the Granite State Designers and Installers Association executive board, and current president of

the N. H. Land Surveyors Association.

--Clifford Trafton, Trafton Excavating, Milton. A state permitted septic installer, Mr. Trafton is immediate past

chairman of GSDI, and has been involved with the septic installation industry for many years.

-- Bob Dingee, City of Rochester, Health Officer. Attended and took part in the Rochester program.

--Don Arsenault, Town of Northwood, Health Officer, Building Inspector. Attended and took part in the Northwood (Bow Lake) program.

--Gene Perreault, Town of Hampton Falls, Health Officer. Attended and took part in the Hampton Falls program.

Several other GSDIA volunteers and staffers also attended the workshops and were active participants, offering suggestions and advice when appropriate.

The workshops were very well received as in the similar series hosted in 2001. Interest was high; lots of questions

were advanced; and people were in no hurry to leave, an indication they seek answers, are concerned about their septic

systems, and how they could prolong the system's life. When people stay until 10 p.m. on one of the hottest days of the

summer in a non-air conditioned rooms, this should be strong indications of interest, and eagerness to learn!

The attentiveness and eagerness to ask questions was striking at all six workshops.

## INTRODUCTION and PROJECT GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

This grant was awarded to Granite State Designers and Installers Association and was in response to the N. H.

Estuaries Project A Request for Proposals for 2002 Local Grants. @ The proposal submitted by GSDI was in response to the

N. H. Estuaries Project request for proposals which indicated one of its highest priorities is to provide information to citizens of the coastal watershed related to septic systems to help improve water quality. Another high priority of the Estuaries Project is to encourage use of innovative alternative technologies for failing septic systems to help improve water quality. GSDIA's goal was to develop a program which would address these high action plan priorities.

Quoting from the N. H. Estuaries Work Plan: Bacteria from nonpoint source pollution has caused the closure of shellfish beds in NH. Failing septic systems have been linked to water quality impairment in several areas throughout NH's coast. This workshop series will provide information directly to landowners, particularly those with shore front property, on the proper functioning and maintenance of septic systems. This project will implement NHEP Management Plan Actions WQ-13 and WQ-14 and EDU-1. We believe we have helped fulfill this objective.

Specifically, GSDIA was charged with working with the N. H. Estuaries Project to identify at least six workshop locations. GSDIA, as charged, located and confirmed facilities and dates for the workshops, with concurring agreement coming from the NHEP.

GSDIA was also charged and has fulfilled this mission:

- 1) Organize, promote and host workshops, to include experienced septic system designers and installers with teaching experience, septic system inspectors, and local health officers.
- 2) Workshops to explain septic system function and maintenance, dos and don'ts of systems, and application of alternative leaching products.
- 3) A working model of a septic system to be incorporated at each workshop.
- 4) Handouts to be supplied to each attendee, as well as information from the N.H. Department of Environmental Services= fact sheets on septic systems and shoreland protection laws and regulations.
- 5) To publicize we used a variety publicity techniques. We issued public service announcements to local radio stations and cable channels, prepared and distributed flyers and promotional pieces near workshop locations, sent out news releases to area newspapers, and placed paid advertisements in area newspapers serving workshop locations.
- 6) Each attendee was to be presented a complimentary copy of GSDI's popular, useful and educational septic system recordkeeping file folder.
- 7) GSDI to provide evaluation surveys to all workshop participants. Results to be compiled and provided to NHEP.

#### METHODS WE USED TO COMPLETE THIS AGREEMENT/CONTRACT

- 1) Once the grant was awarded, we worked closely with the NHEP staff, and Granite State Designers

and Installers

Association members. The GSDIA executive board was highly supportive, and participatory.

2) GSDIA staff identified three key lead instructors who, again, all agreed to be at each of the six seminars to provide volunteer teaching/participation.

3) GSDIA staff also made contact with administrators at the Sub-surface Systems Bureau of NHDES who quickly agreed to again work with GSDIA by supplying at least one area inspector at each of the six workshops, and provide an original of Afact sheets@ from the Department for public use about septic systems, their maintenance, etc. (GSDIA made copies of each for handouts at the workshops.)

4) GSDIA located and arranged for use of all six workshop locations to be used.

5) We developed, distributed and purchased public service announcements for radio stations, news releases, flyers, and paid advertising to promote the seminars. (Samples of advertisements placed in local media and our news releases are enclosed.) Paid advertising was strategically placed to bring maximum response. (It appears paid advertising in newspapers was one of the most effective promotional tools we utilized to get attendance.) Each of the six individual workshops was promoted individually.

6) Securing address labels from the NHEP, we made a promotional mailing of the upcoming seminars to property owners in the seacoast area, all believed to be shoreland property owners with septic systems. It announced the time, location and purpose of the three free evening seminars.

7) We interviewed with local newspaper editors, and radio stations to promote the seminars.

8) We involved local land use and protective associations to promote attendance at the workshops.

Numerous and

repeated contacts were made with local and regional river watershed groups and coalitions, county conservation district staff,

local health officers and sewage enforcement personnel to help increase awareness of the programs at the local level. Without

exception all groups contacted were willing to include a copy of the program in their own publications or made mention of it in

other communications. Groups included:

-- New Hampshire Lakes Association

-- Cocheco River Watershead Coalition

-- New Hampshire Rivers Council

-- Friends of the Isinglass River

Additional commitments of support include:

-- Bow Lake Camp Owners Association (Northwood location)

-- Rockingham County Conservation District (newsletter insert)

-- Strafford County Conservation District (newsletter insert)

-- Lamprey River Coalition

9) Organized GSDIA volunteers to also assist at the workshops to also relate septic pumping procedures, and

importance of same, help provide administration and refreshments.

10) A complimentary refreshment break was provided at each of the six seminars.

11) Local government health officials were also contacted to encourage their assistance in promoting the workshops and to personally participate, offering their localized regulations, and experiences. Such participation also served as a good public relations gesture to show attendees the importance of protecting the environment, and to demonstrate good cooperation and working relationships between regulators, government officials, and citizens.

10) Provided all types of free handouts at the workshops, including providing each attendee with a copy of GSDIA=s popular and informative ASeptic System Recordkeeping File and Owner=s Guide,@ and materials secured from NHDES.

11) Sought out reactions from attendees about each of the workshops. Evaluations were handed out for completion by each attendee. Before and after each seminar, GSDIA executive office usually received phone calls from area citizens seeking additional answers to their septic concerns, to get more information, and occasionally to secure referrals so a professional could evaluate their own individual situations. Reactions/responses were highly complimentary and positive; interest and participation was high.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A total of 172 interested citizens attended the six workshops. Add to this at least a half dozen workshops participants, all working as volunteers, at each workshop.

The workshop locations and number that attended our workshops were as follows:

\$ Wed., May 29, Community Center, Rochester-- 10 attended  
\$ Tuesday, June 18, Urban Forestry Center, Portsmouth-- 31 attended  
\$ Monday, July 8, Hampton Falls Town Hall--21 attended  
\$ Wed., July 24, Northwood Town Hall--48 attended  
\$ Wed., August 14, Exeter Town Hall--27 attended  
\$ Monday, Sept. 9, Newmarket Town Hall--35 attended

As indicated above, each of the workshops had been scheduled from 7 to 9 p.m., and all were still going strong at 9:30 p.m. One of our instructors has stated he believes each could have easily become a four-hour seminar and still hold the attendee=s attention.

Each of the workshops was designed to explain septic systems, how they work, and how they should be maintained. We also were charged with identifying and explaining some of the proprietary alternative leaching products now in use here in NH, and how they can be potentially used by homeowners in the seacoast area. Each program was also designed to provide ample time for asking individual questions and providing answers about system operation, function, maintenance, etc. Everyone in the audience, including area septic inspectors, health officers, etc., was encouraged to participate. This question/answer also

provided opportunity for workshop leaders to focus discussion to specific concerns and experience of property owners with septic systems.

At each of the workshops it became very evident that many attendees had very little knowledge of septic systems, how they work, and what they should be doing to maintain their investments. We were impressed by attendees= sincere interest and desire to learn, and how each walked away from the workshops feeling they will benefit from this increased knowledge, as we all work toward improving our environment.

It also became obvious to GSDIA and its many volunteers who participated at these workshops, there is a significant further need to educate our citizenry about the adverse impact improperly operating (and failed!) septic systems can have on our environment, water resources, etc. Citizens need to be constantly reminded of their responsibilities for maintaining properly functioning septic systems, how to identify when a system is approaching failure, and importance of getting a bad situation fixed, before it more significantly impacts adversely our environment.

We believe the workshops were successful and informative. Now the challenge: How do we get necessary education to the many citizens with septic systems who did not participate in these informative workshops, so, they too, can also gain needed knowledge to help protect our valued resources in the coastal areas of New Hampshire...and statewide?

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the attendance at each location and on the nature of the questions posed by participants, there exists considerable interest in the subject among homeowners with on-site systems, to learn and understand how they function, and how they should be maintained. There should be considerably more workshops and seminars of this nature in the future.

Our recommendation is that local and state authorities, working in conjunction with Granite State Designers and Installers Association, the N.H. Department of Environmental Services, and all types of publics take a more pro-active stance in providing additional information useful to homeowners with on-site wastewater treatment systems...statewide.

This information could take the form of additional workshops, providing printed materials to homeowners with septic systems, and making available GSDIA=s Septic System Recordkeeping Files Folders which is an excellent reminder about conducting routine system maintenance. Fact sheets, such as those from N.H. Dept. of Environmental Resources provided at

the workshops (and available on line) should also be more extensively distributed. We believe continued live presentations/workshops in all New Hampshire communities--and as part of other appropriate town forums--should be encouraged, hosted and promoted. The real estate agent/broker community should also be involved.

The continuation of grant funds to non-profit groups such as GSDIA, and others, to further general public education about on-site wastewater disposal systems will be crucial to gaining increased public understanding. Providing continuing information to citizens of the coastal watershed related to septic systems to help improve water quality should remain one of 10 highest priorities on the NHEP list of action plans, until far greater numbers of area citizens understand workings and functions of septic systems...and shellfish beds can remain open. GSDIA hopes to be a part of this much needed activity in months and years ahead....and hopes it can get a continuation of this educational series in 2003 through the N. H. Estuaries Project.

#### Seminar Evaluation Recap

\* Ads placed in local and regional newspapers proved to be the most effective method of marketing and promoting the six seminars. In addition, press releases sent to N.H. daily and weekly newspapers generated either news items or at least listings on event calendars. Posting of flyers in town halls and other locations frequented by the public was also effective.

\* Our mailing to town clerks and town officials also proved valuable especially in attracting seasonal residents who were making yearly visits (while in NH) to their local town halls and noticed the printed flyer hanging in the town hall, post office and libraries.

\* Nearly all of the survey respondents indicated that the program was worthwhile, with more than 75% of them coming with a specific question in mind. With a few exceptions, they also indicated that their question was answered satisfactorily.

\* Respondents also indicated a strong interest in attending another program on a similar or related topic.